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THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

MASTER OF MEDIA, CULTURE AND CREATIVE CITIES 2013-2015

SOCI8030
CAPSTONE PROJECT

PROJECT TITLE

THE ROLE OF HKIFF IN THE COMMERCIAL MARKET OF ART HOUSE CINEMA IN HONG KONG

COMMUNITY PARTNER

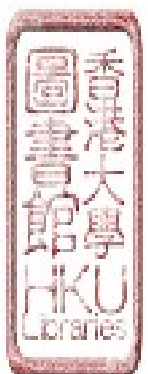
HONG KONG INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (HKIFF)

SUBMITTED BY

SHEK, CHING FUNG

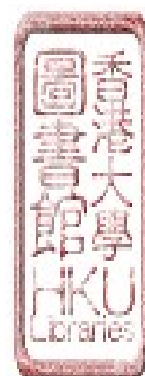
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On 2nd August 2015



Extract

This paper came out from a research project between the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF) and the University of Hong Kong. As HKIFF is approaching its 40th Anniversary, we set out to find out non-mainstream films that the festival has introduced to Hong Kong's film culture throughout the years. In particular, we were looking for films which were pick up by local cinema theatre circuit for commercial release, after HKIFF's inclusion in its screening programmes. The research gradually shed light on a constantly changing relationship between the festival and commercial distributors – ranging from one of collaborators to a more ambiguous relationship of collaborators and competitors – and issues of power in the international film festival circuit.



Acknowledgement

Special thanks to Li Cheuk-To and Geoffrey Wong from the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF) - Thank you for sharing your professional knowledge during some of the busiest time in the year. A wholehearted thanks to my academic advisor Dr Ng Chun-Hung - I believe the most important lessons have not directly come into this report, but it will perhaps linger for even longer. Thank you!

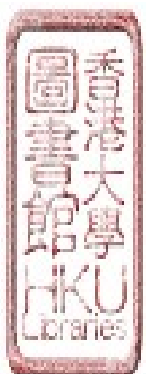
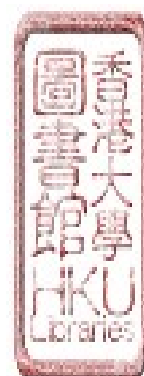


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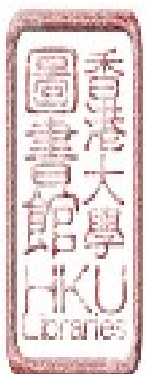


This paper came out from a research project between the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF) and the University of Hong Kong. As HKIFF is approaching its 40th Anniversary, we set out to find out non-mainstream films that the festival has introduced to Hong Kong's film culture throughout the years. In particular, we were looking for films which were pick up by local cinema theatre circuit for commercial release, after HKIFF's inclusion in its screening programmes. The research gradually shed light on a constantly changing relationship between the festival and commercial distributors – ranging from one of collaborators to a more ambiguous relationship of collaborators and competitors – and issues of power in the international film festival circuit.

The History of European Film Festivals

Before we touch on issues that are directly related to HKIFF, let us first look at the origin of contemporary film festivals and point out current debates around the subject.

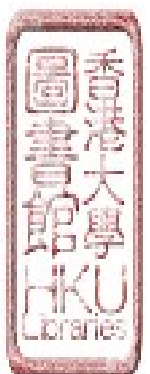
After the First World War and the invention of sound films, European cinema gradually lost its dominance in the international film market. The first film festivals were then established in Europe in 1930s to counter Hollywood's growing domination. The first two festivals were Venice and Cannes, which were established in 1932 and 1939 respectively. These festivals were organized more like a Olympic Games on films, where selection of films were done by 'inviting nations to send in festival entries' (De Valck 2007: 103) with an intention 'to show 'the best' of national cinema productions (as artistic accomplishments and expressions of cultural identities)' (ibid: 102). As to maintain their popularity and relevance, these festivals have since then relied heavily on the glamour of Hollywood movie stars and celebrities - a practice and winning formula that persists until today.



It is not our main focus to investigate factors that made Hollywood successful, but it is worth pointing out one important factor, which is Hollywood's studio system because it contrasts with the dispersed network structure of the international film festival circuit. The Hollywood studio system is a vertically-integrated system of film production and distribution (De Valck 2007). It is a highly concentrated system where studios have control over the whole process from scriptwriting and filming, distribution to the screening of a film. Among many other reasons, such a thorough control over production and distribution processes is regarded as an important factor that helped Hollywood grow into dominance during that era, among other factors such as language, narrative structure and content and more.

The second important stage of development of film festivals began in the year of 1968, where we saw the rise of independent programming (De Valck 2007). Instead of merely being an exhibition site of national cinema, film festivals started actively selecting film entries and gradually established their standards of cinematic aesthetics. Film festivals thus became an authority of cinematic arts and had direct influence to film culture. They would categorize films in stylistic movements and recognize films that touch on political and taboo topics (De Valck 2007), which reflects their counter-hegemonic values. The selection of films into their programmes and competitions gradually carried heavy weight in terms of recognition of cinematic quality and film cultural value.

In the 1990s, film festivals gradually expanded their operation beyond exhibition sites and authorities of cinema but into commercial activities as well. Many larger film festivals now run alongside their screening programmes, co-production markets and established festival funds that support non-mainstream production. Some are skeptical of such development and its negative influence to film culture. These worries include the emergence of the festival films (films that ca

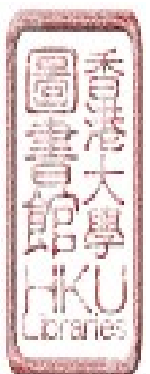


only survive within the circuit) (Frodon 2010). This assumes that film festivals should be able to enhance film productions in securing commercial release opportunities. It is, however, believed that the majority of non-mainstream productions that entered festivals were not able to secure commercial release opportunities. That way the film festival circuit is only a platform where non-mainstream cinema remain marginalised, instead of having a springboard function that helps films achieve commercial independence. And that commercialization may put festivals into an art/commercial dilemma where its autonomy will be eroded (De Valck 2014; Peeranson 2009).

Functions of Film Festivals

Depending on the functions they perform, film festivals fall into a continuum of two ideal festival models (Peranson 2009), which are the audience festival and the business festival. An audience festival focuses its operation on being an exhibition site. More reputable audience festivals are also authorities of film aesthetics and therefore the second function as well. On the other end of the continuum is the business festival, which usually carry all four functions and are regarded as the more important film festivals.

Much like the global city concept (Sassen 1991) where cities are regarded as nodal points in the network and assumed different functions, the international film festival circuit is also a core-periphery concept (Stringer 2001) which assumes a hierarchy of importance and a division of labour within the circuit. Much depending on how the four functions of film festivals are performed, the circuit implies that some festivals are more important than the others and that festivals may perform different functions within the whole circuit. Larger and more historical film festivals such as Berlin, Cannes and Venice are among these important festivals in the core (De Valck 2014). Festivals such as Hong Kong, Vancouver and many others lie in between the spectrum and structure, while



other small audience festivals remain in the periphery.

The first function of film festivals is to provide screening opportunities. Film festivals operate as an alternative distribution network and exhibition sites. Many productions which otherwise would not be able to secure commercial release opportunities now may find its commercial distributors and by showing in a number of festivals reach a wide demographic of audience. Many agree that the circuit is successful in performing its exhibition site function (De Valck 2007; Iordanova 2009) where many smaller-budget and niche productions can be seen by the audience.

Secondly, programming selection and competitions of prestigious film festivals offer aesthetic recognition for some of these productions, which enhances their chances in securing commercial release opportunities and gaining media exposure. In his study of the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR), de Valck (2014) observes the strategic uses of terms like “authentic”, “talent”, “innovative” which forms a discourse that ‘positions filmmakers in the art historical lineage of other great masters in fine art, literature, theatre, dance and music’ (ibid: 44). In this sense, recognitions are not merely on individual films, but on the creative genius of the filmmakers as well. Audience, likewise, is ‘invited to make sense of the films and filmmakers in light of a specific Western tradition of “reading” (high) art’ (ibid: 44). Therefore, films selected by and especially those awarded are more than entertainment and commodities but carry artistic values as well. Ideally, with the recognition from festivals, films will go on and secure commercial release opportunities, through which they will be able to reach a wider audience and realize their financial value.

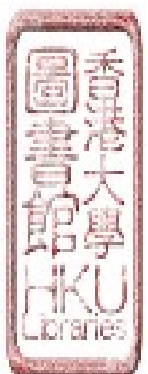
Thirdly, it is a recent development where many international film festivals expanded their operation to become co-production markets and festival funds. As co-production markets, they act as



matchmakers between filmmakers and financiers. The International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR), for example, runs a co-production market where they would annually ‘pre-select a limited number of film projects’ of international appeal and use ‘their authority as cultural gatekeepers’ to attract potential investors (De Valck 2014). Likewise, the establishment of festival funds provides financial support to filmmakers who would otherwise fall short of resources. Festival funds have an advantage over direct government funding in terms of its authority in cinematic aesthetics. By putting a mark of quality on their selection, festivals help filmmakers secure further funding and subsequently in marketing to the audience. The expansion to the film market function is in essence expanding film festival’s influence further along the vertical – from merely being an exhibition function to a production function.

Finally, festivals are meeting points of players in the film industry where they can network, share market trends and information and make business deals. Festivals provide formal (such as film forums and conference) and informal settings (such as parties and receptions) for these purposes. Some scholars (De Valck 2007; Iordanova 2009) highlight the importance of these informal settings, which enables filmmakers (especially new talents) to make important contact which would be difficult in more formal settings. Moreover, film professionals also pick up market trends in festivals. In Cannes, for example, festival publications such as European Audiovisual Observatory’s annual report (which offers market information in Europe) and daily festival newspapers (which offers opinions and analysis of market data) allows film professionals to ‘catch up on world film market trends’ (De Valck 2007: 111).

In the sections that follow, I will discuss with reference to the history of HKIFF and the findings of my data research on how these functions have been performed by the festival.

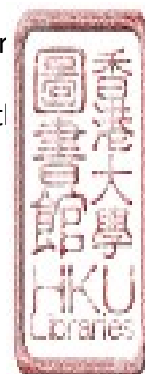


A Brief History of HKIFF & Hong Kong Cinema

This section briefly looks at the development of HKIFF with reference to the history of local film culture of Hong Kong. The argument is that the original intention of establishing a film festival as a response to promote film culture has fundamental effect to its programming decision to recent days, and that the specific historical context of the film culture of Hong Kong contributed to a more foreign film oriented tradition of the festival.

In 1977, the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF) was established under a collective effort between the colonial government of Hong Kong and a group of cinephile from local film clubs. The government's initiative was believed to be a response to the blossoming interest in alternative cinema – 'alternative' in the sense that it provides films that would otherwise unavailable to the people of Hong Kong, and so does not necessarily mean avant-garde cinema (Wong 2011). The festival, therefore, at least in this side of its operation has a root of being very much an audience-oriented festival. Unlike European film festivals whose establishments were entangled in regional politics between European countries and which were charged with the aim to promote and protect national cinema in resistance to the Hollywood dominance (De Valck 2007), HKIFF was established against the backdrop of a very different film culture. Instead of being an effort against Hollywood's cinema, HKIFF was also meant to provide alternatives to mainstream Hong Kong cinema.

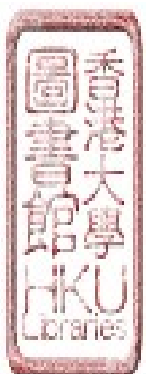
Throughout these years, the Hong Kong film industry was a very strong presence in the city, whose box office revenue has outperformed imported Hollywood cinema until 1990s (Chan 2011). The local market was largely dominated by martial art and action movies, as well as comedy that frequents hilarious and vagarious plots and jokes. Western art-house and world cinema therefore were therefore a reasonable strategy to work towards the commitment of providing the city with quality alternative cinema.



As the aim was to expand the cinematic horizon of local moviegoers, the programming team has always favoured art-house films that have potential of commercial success. Their selection judgement is a relational approach to film culture, instead of one that focuses on rigorous cinematic aesthetics and innovation. Theoretically, this resembles a tango dance with local film culture – if the local film culture nurtured a growing acceptance of more adventurous art-house end, HKIFF would feature selections more towards the avant-garde end of the spectrum, and vice versa.

While without an ambition to become an international presence, HKIFF gradually grew to become ‘a festival about Hong Kong and Asian cinema as well as a screening of foreign art films for local audience’ (Wong 2011). Alongside with its programme catalogues, HKIFF has always published topical retrospective and studies of Hong Kong (and later on Asian) cinema. It then gradually attracted the attention from film critics, scholars and film professionals from abroad, such as Ulrich Gregor from the Forum of the Berlin International Film Festival, film scholar David Bordwell, as well as people from the British film journal *Sight and Sound* and the French *Cahiers du Cinema* (Wong 2011). These gradually helped the international success of Hong Kong cinema and Asian cinema. Without much regional competition, HKIFF has gradually enjoyed international recognition as a first-tier festival in the international film festival circuit.

At the turn of the century, HKIFF went through its corporatization, gaining independence from the Hong Kong Government (which although continued to provide funding support). Alongside its corporatization, HKIFF also expanded its operation to establish its co-production markets and competitions, as well as gradually worked more closely with local celebrities (who usually work across sectors, from movies, music and sometimes television) and the ritual on the red carpet. A



these shifts, HKIFF was at times criticized as too commercial and lost its artistic autonomy as an aesthetics-driven festival. My argument is that these measures of commercialization are necessary steps to take in order for HKIFF to remain competitive and relevant in the international film festival circuit.

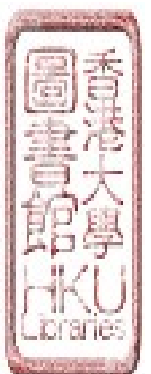
Data Research: The Film Matching Exercise

When we set out to do the data research, our hypothesis is that some non-mainstream films will be able to secure commercial release opportunities after their screenings in festivals. In this specific case, we are looking at non-mainstream films that have secured commercial release opportunities in Hong Kong after their screenings in HKIFF. It was based on assumptions that festivals provide credits for these films and places them as films of quality.

Methodology

In order to evaluate the influence of HKIFF on local film culture, an effort was made to identify films that were subsequently released commercially in Hong Kong, after their inclusion in screenings of HKIFF. The project set out to analyze film programmes from the period between 1987 to 2005 – a period that cover the festival's early formation years and its later corporatization.

English title of films were extracted from film programmes of HKIFF from the year 1987 to 2006. These titles were reformatted to retain a consistency and eliminate possible errors resulting from different treatments of prepositions and articles normally found in index pages. The data was then put into an automatic matching process to identify overlappings with commercial release data gathered from multiple sources.



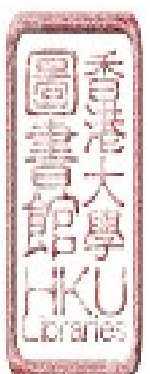
Due to the unavailability of an official set of box office figures for the intended period of studies, the project gathered box office data from multiple sources, which include Movie Mojo (covering the year 2002 to 2014), Film Development Council of Hong Kong (covering the year 2012 to 2013) and www.playitagain.info - an online database of commercial release records of foreign films (covering the year 1987 to 2014). Because films involved in the projects originated from different languages and regions, original and translated titles were preserved whenever possible during the matching process.

Matched titles were then manually verified against film programmes of HKIFF, sources of box office figures and IMDb, with name of director, year of production and Chinese titles of these films. During the process, information of production companies, world sales agent and distribution companies, as well as print source were recorded.

The process was able to identify films that were subsequently released commercially in Hong Kong after their inclusion in screenings of HKIFF and shed light on the issues of the rise of sales agents and the interplay between HKIFF and local commercial distributors.

Three sessions of project meetings were conducted between the programming team of HKIFF and a team of five postgraduate student researchers from the University of Hong Kong. Our academic advisor was involved in two of these meetings, where major directions of research and methodology of data collection were set out.

Individual in-depth interviews with two members of staff from the programming team of HKIFF



were conducted by me as I approached to the end of the data collection process. The focuses of these interviews were on the films that were subsequently released commercially in Hong Kong after their inclusion in screenings of HKIFF, the relationship between HKIFF and local distributors, the selection process of programming and observations of the local film culture.

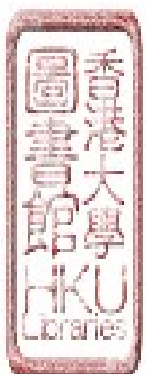
Findings:

The result of the data research was able to identify 124 titles from 1987 to 2005, which were both selected by HKIFF and commercially released in Hong Kong. However, the majority of these films had secured commercial release opportunities in Hong Kong before their screenings in HKIFF. Distribution rights of many of these titles were bought by commercial distributors in Hong Kong, before their screenings in HKIFF (as shown in table 2.1). Few films actually were able to secure commercial release opportunities (as shown in table 1.1).

Here, it is important to point out that it is usual for distributors to go into all-right release deals, which means that if festivals would like to include these films in their programmes, they would need the permission from the distributors in the region. This points to the fact that when HKIFF produced their programmes they are constrained, instead of how it is usually assumed that they always get what they want to include.

Table 1.1: Films That Have Secured Commercial Release Opportunities in Hong Kong after Screenings in HKIFF

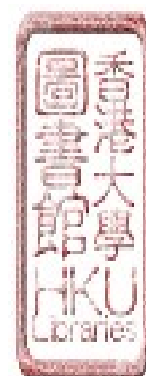
Title (English)	Title (Chinese)	Screening in HKIFF	Director
Laputa	天空之城	1987	Hayao Miyazaki
Burning Flowers	花落又逢春	1988	Eva Dahr, Eva Isaken
Prick Up Your Ears	留心那話兒	1988	Stephen Frears
Summer Vacation 1999	世紀末暑假	1989	Shusuke Kaneko
Beijing Watermelon	北京的西瓜	1990	Nobuhiki Obayashi
Drugstore Cowboy	迷幻牛郎	1990	Gus Van Sant



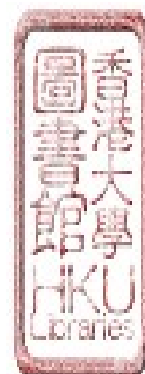
Paris by Night	情劫花都夜	1990	David Hare
Three Women in Love	教我如何不愛他	1990	Rudolf Thome
The Garden	花園	1991	Derek Jarman
High Heels	情迷高踭鞋	1992	Pedro Almodovar
Lessons of Darkness	黑暗的教訓	1993	Werner Herzog
Romper Stomper	無髮無天	1993	Geoffrey Wright
Before the Rain	山雨欲來	1995	Milcho Manchevski
Burnt by the Sun	毒太陽	1995	Nikita Mikhalkov
Clerks	便利店氹氹轉	1995	Kevin Smith
Quiet Days of Firemen	等救火的日子	1995	Naoto Takenaka
Antonia's Line	單親大聯盟	1996	Marleen Gorris
Blue in the Face	煙下集大結局之七日鮮	1996	Wayne Wong, Paul Auster
The Thief	與盜同眠	1998	Pavel Chukhrai
Under the Sand	沙堆下	2001	Francois Ozon
Ken Park		2003	Larry Clark, Ed Lachman
Beautiful Boxer	人妖打擂台	2004	Ekachai Uekrongtham
Fear of Intimacy	追蹤眼前人	2004	Vincent Chui
The Barbarian Invasions	蠻夷美利堅	2004	Denys Arcand
The Dreamers	戲夢巴黎	2004	Bernardo Bertolucci
The Return	爸不得愛你	2004	Andrey Zvyagintsev
Dear Frankie	爸爸愛的回信	2005	Shona Auerback
Kamikaze Girls	下妻物語	2005	Tetsuya Nakashima
Tony Takitani	東尼瀧谷	2005	Jun Ichikawa

Table 1.2: Films That Have Secured Commercial Release Opportunities in Hong Kong Before Screenings in HKIFF

Title (English)	Title (Chinese)	Screening in HKIFF	Director
Betrayed	叛侶	1989	Costa-Gavras
Bird	八哥傳	1989	Clint Eastwood
Love and Fear	三姐妹	1989	Margarette von Trotta
Pelle the Conqueror	赤子雄心	1989	Bille August
Do the Right Thing	不作虧心事	1990	Spike Lee
A Handful of Time	隔世相思	1991	Martin Asphaug
Everybody's Fine	天倫之旅	1991	Giuseppe Tornatore
Metropolitan	小貴族	1991	Whit Stillman
The Nasty Girl	壞女孩	1991	Michael Verhoeven
Johnny Suede	玉面小至尊	1992	Tom DiCillo
The Good Woman of Bangkok	曼谷風月實錄	1992	Dennis O'Rourke
Toto the Hero	小英雄杜杜	1992	Jaco van Dormael
A Heart in Winter	今生情未了	1993	Claude Sautet
The Best Intentions	情天未老	1993	Bille August
Cows	牛	1994	Julio Medem
Kika	蕩女	1994	Pedro Almodovar



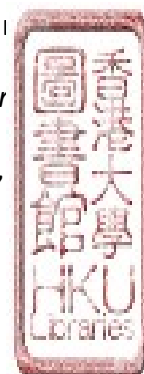
Love and Human Remains	現代風月寶鑑	1994	Denys Arcand
The Red Squirrel	紅松鼠殺人事件	1994	Julio Medem
Daughters	風裡落花	1995	Chatrichalerm Yukol
Exotica	性感俱樂部	1995	Atom Egoyan
Heavenly Creatures	罪惡天使	1995	Peter Jackson
Once Were Warriors	夕陽武士	1995	Lee Tamahori
Priest	神父同志	1995	Antonia Bird
The Dead Mother	殺手・蝴蝶・夢	1995	Juanma Bajo Ulloa
The Last Seduction	最後的誘惑	1995	John Dahl
Through the Olive Trees	橄欖樹下的情人	1995	Abbas Kiarostami
Dead Man Walking	死囚 168 小時	1996	Tim Robbins
From Dusk Till Dawn	殺出個黎明	1996	A Band Apart
Georgia	各自各精彩	1996	Ulu Grosbard
Guantanamo	出殯也瘋狂	1996	Tomas Gutierrez Alea, Juan Carlos Tabio
Lisbon Story	里斯本故事	1996	Wim Wenders
Mighty Aphrodite	無敵愛美神	1996	Woody Allen
Nobody Loves Me	情來自方	1996	Doris Dorrie
Rendezvous in Paris	巴黎的約會	1996	Eric Rohmer
Smoke	生命中不能承受的煙	1996	Wayne Wang
The Doom Generation	玩盡末世紀	1996	Gregg Araki
The Flower of My Secret	愛火花	1996	Pedro Almodovar
The Horseman on the Roof	愛在天地蒼茫時	1996	Jean-Paul Rappeneau
Total Eclipse	心之全蝕	1996	Agnieszka Holland
All Things Fair	教室別戀	1997	Bo Widerberg
Earth	人間昆蟲記	1997	Julio Medem
Full speed	狂野青春	1997	Gael Morel
Kolya	給我一個爸	1997	Jan Sverak
Ponette	小孤星	1997	Jacques Doillon
Unhook the Stars	摘星之女	1997	Nick Cassavetes
12 Storeys	隔牆故事	1998	Eric Khoo
Four Days in September	九月某四天	1998	Bruno Barreto
Hana-Bi	花火	1998	Kitano Takeshi
Junk Mail	人渣正傳	1998	Pal Sletaune
Kids Return	壞孩子的天空	1998	Kitano Takeshi
Postman Blues	盜信情緣	1998	Sabu
The End of Violence	暴力啟示錄	1998	Wim Wenders
The Scar	生命的烙印	1998	Krzysztof Kieslowski
We All Fall Down	人生三文治	1998	Davide Ferrario
Another Day in Paradise	天堂無路	1999	Larry Clark
Celebrity	名人百態	1999	Woody Allen
Eternity and a Day	一生何求	1999	Theo Angelopoulos
Happiness	你快樂嗎	1999	Todd Solondz
Little Tony	妙在大門後	1999	Alex van Warmerdam
Run Lola Run	疾走羅拉	1999	Tom Tykwer



The Dreamlife of Angels	兩極天使	1999	Erick Zonca
The Idiots	越笨越開心	1999	Lars von Trier
eXistenZ	感官遊戲	2000	David Cronenberg
Gemini	雙生兒	2000	Tsukamoto Shinya
Holy Smoke	性煙	2000	Jane Campion
The Million Dollar Hotel	地痞酒店謀殺案	2000	Wim Wenders
The Wind Will Carry us	風再起時	2000	Abbas Kiarostami
Onegin	奧涅金	2001	Martha Fiennes
Panic	殺手無罪	2001	Henry Bromell
The Ninth Gate	魔鬼手記	2001	Roman Polanski
The Straight Story	路直路彎	2001	David Lynch
The Weight of Water	兩生迷離劫	2001	Kathryn Bigelow
Blue Spring	藍色青春	2002	Toyoda Toshiaki
Gosford Park	高斯福大宅謀殺案	2002	Robert Altman
Heaven	疾走天堂	2002	Tom Tykwer
Ichi the Killer	殺手阿一	2002	Miike Takashi
No Man's Land	無人地帶	2002	Danis Tanovic
The Devil's Backbone	魔童魅影	2002	Guillermo del Toro
Adaptation	何必偏偏玩謝我	2003	Spike Jonze
Dirty Pretty Things	天使夜驚情	2003	Stephen Frears
Dolls	偶斷絲連	2003	Kitano Takeshi
Far From Heaven	天上人間	2003	Todd Haynes
Spider	蜘蛛夢魘	2003	David Cronenberg
Sweet Sixteen	雙失十六歲	2003	Ken Loach
The Kid Stays in the Picture	光影流情	2003	Nanette Burstein, Brett Morgan
The Magdalene Sisters	瑪德蓮墜落少女	2003	Peter Mullan
Sylvia	篇篇情意劫	2004	Christine Jeffs
The Singing Detective	奇探心魔	2004	Keith Gordon
Beyond Our Ken	公主復仇記	2005	Edmond Pang
Land of Plenty	迷失天使城	2005	Wim Wenders
Me and My Sister	我倆姊妹情	2005	Alexandra Leclère
Melinda And Melinda	美蓮達與美蓮達	2005	Woody Allen
Monster	美麗女狼	2005	Patty Jenkins

The Case of Pedro Almodovar

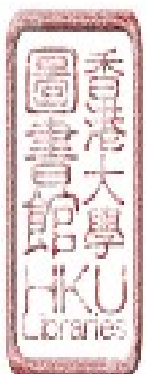
The case of Pedro Almodovar is instructive in illustrating the relationship between distributors and film festivals. HKIFF was an earlier supporter of the work of Pedro Almodovar. From *Law of Desire* in 1992, films of Pedro Almodovar were consistently selected into screening programmes of HKIFF,



the way until *The Flower of My Secret* in 1996. Since 1992, films of Pedro Almodovar was released commercially in Hong Kong – first by Shu Kei’s Creative Workshop and later on by EDKO Co Ltd. During the era when films of Pedro Almodovar were distributed by Shu Kei’s Creative Workshop, HKIFF was able to include Pedro Almodovar in screening programmes obtaining prints from Shu Kei’s Creative Workshop. Later on, HKIFF was not able to do so and resulted in an absence of Pedro Almodovar in the festival.

The purpose of the case is not to depict distributors as greedy entrepreneurs, but to illustrate constraints that HKIFF face and the relationship between HKIFF and commercial distributors. First of all, the inclusion of a film in screening programmes is dependent on the decision of commercial distributors who hold distribution rights of a film in the region. Secondly, it also depends on the relationship of the two entities. In the era when films of Pedro Almodovar were distributed by Shu Kei’s Creative Workshop, which is a specialist distribution company of art house cinema, the two seem to have worked in a more cooperative manner in which HKIFF was considered as a positive platform to the commercial outcome of the film. Obviously, whether the distributor considered the festival as a good platform to kick start some positive word-of-mouth, or whether the inclusion into screening programmes of the festival signals a clear mark of artistic quality, we would not be able to tell evidently at the moment. But it is fair to believe that the inclusion was able to foster a positive outcome.

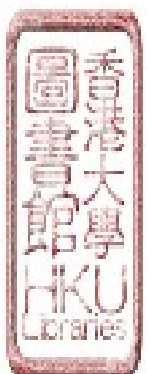
All of these happened as Pedro Almodovar won multiple awards from prestigious film festivals and widely reported awards such as Oscar and BAFTA since 2002, which further enhanced its popular and popular acceptance in Hong Kong.



So later on, films of Pedro Almodovar were distributed by EDKO Co Ltd which marketed both mainstream and non-mainstream films. EDKO was also a leading operator of cinema theatre chains and runs a Broadway Cinematheque in Hong Kong, which regularly shows non-mainstream films. During the interviews with the programming team, the relationship between commercial distributors and the festival was put into questions. I had an impression that while HKIFF was not able to include films of Pedro Almodovar in the latter era, there was not a sense of hostility but an understanding between insiders in an industry, who understand the risk a commercial distributor may face in marketing non-mainstream cinema. So the consideration of commercial distributors, according to the interviews, were largely commercial. It may kick off a spread of negative word-of-mouth. At the same time, there is also worry about the festival's image as a cinephile event which may make films as being considered too artistic, or too distanced from average moviegoers. And sometimes it was because official release were scheduled months after HKIFF, so it does not work with the promotion plan of the distributors.

Table 3: Films of Director Pedro Almodovar and Their Distribution in Hong Kong

Title (English)	Title (Chinese)	Year of Production	HKIFF	Distribution Rights in Hong Kong & Year of Release
Law of Desire	慾望之規條	1987	1988	-
Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown	女為悅己者狂	1988	1989	-
Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!	捆著我困著我	1989	1991	-
High Heels	情迷高跟鞋	1991	1992	Shu Kei's Creative Workshop (1992)
Kika	蕩女	1993	1994	Shu Kei's Creative Workshop (1994)
The Flower of My Secret	愛火花	1995	1996	Shu Kei's Creative Workshop (1996)
Live Flesh	活色生香	1997	-	EDKO Films (1999)
All About My Mother	論盡我阿媽	1999	-	EDKO Films (2000)
Talk to Her	對她有話兒	2002	-	EDKO Films (2002)
Bad Education	聖教慾	2004	-	EDKO Films (2004)
Volver	浮花	2006	-	EDKO Films (2006)
Broken Embraces	情婦的情夫	2009	-	EDKO Films (2010)
The Skin I Live In	我的華麗皮囊	2011	-	EDKO Films (2011)
I'm So Excited!	HIGH 爆雲霄	2013	-	EDKO Films (2013)



The Case of Golden Scene (Commercial Distributor)

As to look at the issue from a different angle, a matching exercise was also done with the film catalogue of Golden Scene Co Ltd – a commercial distributor which deal with both mainstream and non-mainstream cinema in Hong Kong. The matching exercise was able to identify 38 films from Golden Scene's catalogue of 395 since its establishment in 1999. It follows the same pattern where distribution rights of the majority of these films were purchased before their screenings in HKIFF.

The more important insight here, however, is how these films were marketed, especially on how recognitions from film festivals and film awards were employed as recognition of cinematic quality.

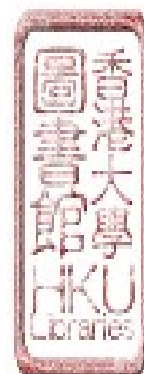
Looking at movie trailers tailored for the Hong Kong market of these films, three distinctive strategies were identified. First of all, awards and nomination in film festivals and film awards are predominately highlighted. Film festivals such as Cannes, Berlin and Venice as well as film awards such as Oscar received the most distinctively highlight – usually treated as the single focus of a shot. These reflect how several festivals and film awards are considered of having more of an authority on cinematic quality. Another strategy is the mention of previous work by the director and lead actors. It reflects the attribution to the *auteur* tradition, where the *auteur* is believed to have a creative genius of continuously creating quality work, as well as the appeal of the stars. And finally, official selections by festivals and film reviews were less frequently but sometimes employed.

While these are all films selected into HKIFF screening programmes, the selection was only used as a marketing point in two of these films. These suggest that competitive elements such as festival and film awards seem to be more able to provide real currency for a film. It also shows a clear hierarchy and power in the international film festival circuit. The value adding power in the circuit



Table 3: Film Selection Release Commercially in Hong Kong by Golden Scene Co Ltd.

Title (English)	Title (Chinese)	Release Date	Distribution Rights Purchased Before HKIFF
Starlet	小明星	Mar 20, 2014	
Disconnect	斷了線	July 25, 2013	
A Story of Yonosuke	那年遇上世之介	July 4, 2013	
No	向政府說不	May 2, 2013	✓
Tokyo Family	東京家族	Apr 18, 2013	✓
Rust and Bone	鏽與骨	Mar 21, 2013	✓
I Wish	奇蹟	May 24, 2012	
Wuthering Heights	咆哮山莊	May 17, 2012	
Coriolanus	英雄叛國記	May 3, 2012	
A Dangerous Method	危險療情	Apr 19, 2012	
Shame	色辱	Apr 12, 2012	✓
Big Blue Lake	大藍湖	Nov 17, 2011	✓
Submarine	愛情潛水	Jun 2, 2011	✓
Buddha Mountain	觀音山	May 5, 2011	
The Drunkard	酒徒	Nov 25, 2010	
Bright Star	閃亮的星星	Aug 26, 2010	✓
Au Revoir Taipei	一頁台北	Aug 19, 2010	
Break Up Club	分手說愛你	Jun 16, 2010	
A Serious Man	非常艷男離奇失婚	Apr 15, 2010	✓
The Messenger	亡情使者	Apr 8, 2010	✓
Happiness	尋找幸福的日子	Oct 30, 2008	
Land of Plenty	迷失天使城	June 30, 2005	✓
Sylvia	篇篇情意劫	June 24, 2004	✓
The Dreamers	戲夢巴黎	June 10, 2004	
Samaritan Girl	內海慈航	May 13, 2004	
Dirty Pretty Things	天使夜驚情	November 27, 2003	✓
The Magdalene Sisters	瑪德蓮墜落少女	October 9, 2003	✓
Spider	蜘蛛夢魘	July 3, 2003	✓
Adaptation	何必偏偏玩謝我	May 29, 2003	✓
City of God	無主之城	May 8, 2003	✓
Dolls	偶斷絲連	April 24, 2003	✓
Far From Heaven	天上人間	April 24, 2003	✓
27 Missing Kisses	27 個遺失的吻	January 31, 2002	✓
The Weight of Water	兩生迷離劫	January 17, 2002	✓
Barking Dogs Never Bite	門口狗	November 29, 2001	
The Goddess of 1967	遇上 1967 的女神	September 13, 2001	✓



Gemini	雙生兒	May 2000	✓
Celebrity	名人百態	Apr 2 1999	

Limitation

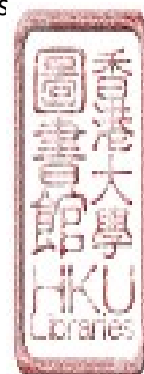
The unavailability of official box office figures was a major difficulty of the research project.

Although existing data sources used in this research were able to indicate whether a film was released commercially, there were aspects of the problems that would have been explored such as the scale of release (whether it is a wide or a limited release) and, although sometimes believed to have a direct relationship to the scale of release, the popularity of the films. These would have enriched the discussion on the state of non-mainstream cinema in Hong Kong.

While the absence of office box office figures has always been criticized (Chan, 2000), some records were available when this research was done. New datasets would also come out in the near future.

The Film Development Council of Hong Kong has produced and made available online detailed box office records of the year 2012 and thereafter. The Film Development Council also provided funding support of HK\$1.3 million to Hong Kong Box Office Limited, a subsidiary of Motion Picture Industry Association (MPIA) and Hong Kong Theatres Association (HKTA), to compile box office figures from 1990 to 2012. The result of the project will be released as an online database for the public after its completion in the last quarter of 2015. As at May 2015, however, it was unknown whether box office figures would be included in the release. Effort have been made to explore the possibility to get access to the data. Hong Kong Box Office Limited was unable to share their findings with this project in the end for understandable reasons and concerns.

It was discovered towards the very end of the project that *Film Bi-Weekly* compiled box office



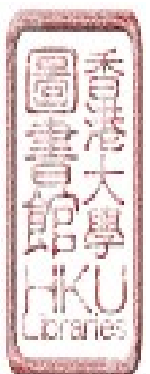
records in its *First-Run Box Office Records 1969-1989* (1969-1989 首輪影片票房紀錄), which was out of print and unavailable in public and university libraries.

Because my aim was to observe any changes during a period of changes in HKIFF, I have ambitiously set out to analyze a longer period of time in spite of the limitation on box office records. It would be possible, were enough time and resources was given, to collect data from primary sources such as magazines and newspaper where weekly box office records were reported. But that way we would have lost sight of the historical changes which we are able to observe currently.

HKIFF was by no means the only player in facilitating the import of non-mainstream foreign cinema into Hong Kong. From the data research, we were able to see that commercial and independent distribution companies such as EDKO Films Ltd, Shu Kei's Creative Workshop and Golden Scene Co Ltd and many others have all contributed throughout the years. Of course due to the professional and personal link between members of staff of the programming team and these people have shed light on some of their thoughts and difficulties. It nevertheless would be a pleasure to meet with them individually. It would have been insightful if we were able to learn from them directly on their journey through the profit and loss of their investment on these more risky products of world cinema. If it was possible, I would have asked them whether they see HKIFF and film festivals as market indicators, what they see as commercially viable, the organizational structure of local film distribution and the state of non-mainstream cinema in Hong Kong.

Conclusion

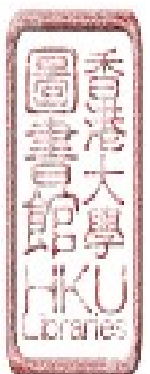
In discussing Cannes's success as the world's most influential film festival, De Valck (2007) has attributed the success to how the festival is able to create economic values to different entities:



‘The competition contributes to the positioning of films in the market; the festival platform and global media attention are used to optimize the release of Hollywood mega-productions; the large number of market premieres is important for it to continue to attract buyers to Cannes’ (De Valck 2007: 120). These are the value-addition and agenda-setting power that facilitate the function of cultural recognition.

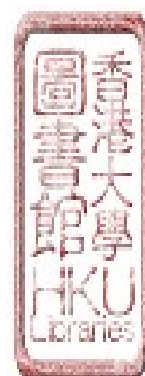
Looking back at the history of HKIFF, we have discovered that the festival has started out very much focused on the function of exhibition, in which the main purpose was to showcase award-winning foreign classics outside mainstream Hollywood and the best of Asian cinema. Over the years, screening programmes of HKIFF have expanded in numbers and included dedicated sections for animation, avant-garde, documentary as well as thematic and retrospective programmes on foreign and Asian cinema. The function of exhibition seems to have been performed well as the festival as a whole have been well attended. In interviews, the programming team also expressed no great difficulty to maintain box office revenue in order to maintain a healthy financial balance.

From local distributor’s perspective, however, as demonstrated by my findings it looks like that official selection into HKIFF programmes does not provide the level of recognition that commercial distributors expect. The same concerns seem affect filmmakers and their sales agent as some of them gave up HKIFF for market premieres elsewhere (Wong 2011; Rayns 2015). The past success of HKIFF in the international film festival circuit was attributed to its success as being an outlet of Asian cinema. Although not running competitive programmes, HKIFF was able to gather the best of film production in the Asia back at a time without much regional competition. But as competition between film festivals become fiercer, filmmakers have at times given up HKIFF and go for other festivals. As film professionals and buyers do expect to be able to catch sight of the most exciting w



in the region (Rayns 2015), it would be crucial for the festival to continue to attract filmmakers and their agent, in which the second function of artistic recognition makes a huge difference. These imply problems in the value-addition power behind HKIFF. In discussion on the case of Cannes, De Valck (2007) emphasized the importance of global media coverage. For HKIFF, although media coverage in such scale is unlikely to achieve overnight, with premiers of key filmmakers (Rayns 2015) and newly added competitions and prizes as well as the engagement with regional celebrities, it looks like that the festival has now got all the ingredients of success.

While the project started off with a focus on the inflow of foreign non-mainstream cinema and its distribution, the focus inevitably comes back to the power of cultural recognition. Although supporters of the festivals have at times criticized these moves, under the international competition among film festivals, measures of commercialization are necessary steps to take in order for HKIFF to remain competitive and relevant in the international film festival circuit. Finally, the findings of my data research may put these loyal supporters at ease, as it shows that HKIFF has remained at more or less similar distance with the mainstream before and after these measures are realized.



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